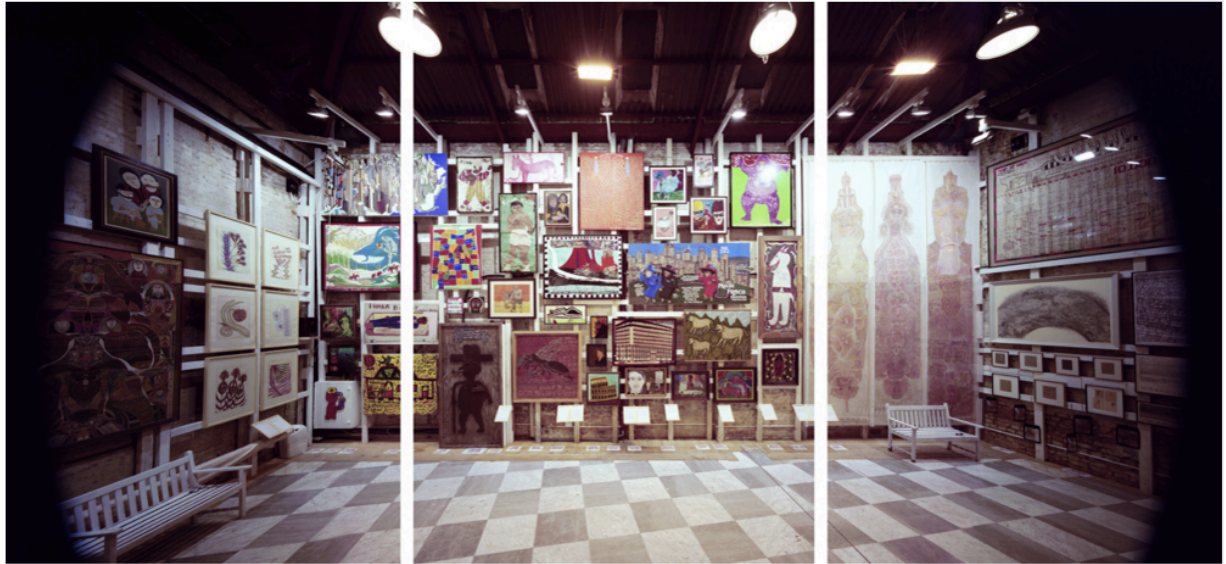


Blog Post



Outsider art; blurring boundaries by Lia Mast

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At present there are two museums which put outsider art in the limelight in the Netherlands. The new Outsider Art Museum that opened in Amsterdam in March this year and The Museum of **Everything** at Kunsthal Rotterdam. This trend seems to be increasingly popular. This raises questions about the difference between outsider art and established art: is this difference getting smaller?

Art brut and outsider art

'Art Brut' and 'outsider art' are terms used for art that is made outside the established canon and society. By this is meant art made by mental patients, people with intellectual disabilities or in detention. The term outsider art is also used for self-taught artists who have never formed part of society.

Hans Prinzhorn (6 June 1886 - 14 June 1933) was one of the most important collectors of outsider art. He worked as a psychiatrist in a psychiatric hospital in Germany. During his working period he expanded the existing psychiatric art collection to 5000 works. His collection, the Prinzhorn Collection, is still displayed at the University of Heidelberg. He also wrote a book about outsider art, *Bildnerei of Geisteskranken* (Artistry of the Mentally Ill), a study of art created by psychiatric patients. The book was well received in the art world and became a source of inspiration for artists, including Jean Dubuffet.

Jean Dubuffet and art brut

Jean Dubuffet (31 July 1901 - 12 May 1983) was a French painter and sculptor. He is known as the creator of the term 'art brut'. Dubuffet was a trained artist but chose to renounce this after seeing the works collected by Prinzhorn. He found established art commercial and according to him, never pure. He saw a roughness, naivety and directness in art brut that he greatly admired. He also began to aspire to these qualities in his own work. In addition, he collected art brut works for his own collection.



Bildnerlei der Geisteskranken van Hans Prinzhorn



Jean Dubuffet - Portrait du soldat Lucien Geominne - 1950

The work of Dubuffet appears primitive and can be called figurative. In it you can clearly see the influence of children and psychiatric patients. Dubuffet used a technique whereby he brought structure to his paintings by mixing his paint with sand, glass or straw. This gives the primitive-looking work an extra dimension. His sculptures are of the same unrefined nature.



Jean Dubuffet - Four Characters - 1974



Jean Dubuffet - Jardin d'émail -1974 - Kröller Muller Museum

In the 70s the term "outsider art" was coined by art critic Roger Cardinal. As the English translation of 'art brut', this term could be used more widely. Not only artists outside society fall under the category of outsider art, but also self-taught and untrained artists.

The 55th Venice Biennale

In 2013 Venice Biennale was a platform for outsider art, where this phenomenon acquired its current fame and popularity. The Venice Biennale is held every two years. It is one of the largest art events in the world, with 28 participating countries. The Netherlands have built their own pavilion, the Rietveld Pavilion, which is used as an exhibition space. In addition to the exhibits that are proposed by the countries themselves, there is each time a thematic exhibition mounted by a curator.

The Encyclopedic Palace of the World

The 55th Biennale was entitled Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace), a work by the self-taught artist Marino Auriti (1891-1980). Auriti was an Italian-American artist who left Italy for America in the '20s. There he worked as a car mechanic but had a passion for architecture. He worked for three years independently on a scale model of The Encyclopedic Palace. He designed this building to house all human knowledge and discoveries: "All the works of man in whatever field, discoveries made and those which may follow." The work is owned by the American Folk Art Museum in New York.



Marino Auriti met het 'Encyclopedic Palace of the World' - c. 1950s - Collectie American Folk Art Museum, New York

33 years after the artist's death the work inspired the theme of the exhibition to curator Massimiliano Gioni. Gioni used the work as a premise to give a direction to the Biennale and the thematic exhibition.

'The Biennale model itself is based on the impossible desire to concentrate the infinite worlds of contemporary art into a single place: a task that now seems as dizzyingly absurd as Auriti's dream.'

To bring so many contemporary artists from different countries together and into a coherent whole seems as difficult and idealistic a task as Auriti's design. Furthermore, he wanted to blur the lines in the thematic exhibition between professional artists and amateurs, outsiders and insiders. The exhibition drew on artists outside the established circuits and also showed the model by Auriti. As a result the work gained international recognition.



The Encyclopedic Palace of the World op de biënnale van Venetië 2013

Shinichi Sawada in the Outsider Art Museum

One of the other artists in this exhibition was the contemporary Japanese artist **Shinichi Sawada**. Sawada is autistic, has a birth anomaly and hardly talks. He makes ceramic sculptures in a very perfectionist way. The exhibition of his work at the Biennale also brought him international fame.



Shinichi Sawada - Untitled - 2006-7 Foto: Francesco Galli



Shinichi Sawada - Untitled - 2006-7 Foto: Francesco Galli

The newly opened Outsider Art Museum in Amsterdam also displays work by Sawada. The museum focuses on contemporary art and emerging talent. In this permanent exhibition, the museum presents more than 100 works by English, Dutch, French and Iranian artists. In addition, there is a special room dedicated to Japanese outsider artists, which includes Sawada.

The Museum of Everything

The Museum of **Everything** is a British collection of outsider art in the form of a traveling museum. The exhibition consists of an overview of over one hundred works of art from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. One of the more famous artists is **Augustin Lesage** (1876-1954), discovered by **Jean Dubuffet**. Lesage was a miner in France when he heard a voice which predicted he would one day become a painter. Lesage's oeuvre consists of large paintings in which symmetry plays an important role. They are very detailed paintings with numerous patterns.

Like Gioni this travelling museum wants to blur the lines between professional and self-taught artists. It has a different perspective on outsider art, it rejects this and similar politically correct terms. It prefers to speak of undiscovered, unintentional and untrained artists. So says the British founder of The Museum of **Everything**, James Brett: "Our job is to place these artists within the context of art and not to rule them out as outsiders. We struggle for the universal right to freedom of visual expression ... not for a small group of select few, but for everyone! "

Today there are of course smaller differences between professionals and amateurs in the art world. The self-taught artist is very relevant in the art world, a diploma is certainly no longer a requirement. Also, rough art, or art entirely coming from the inner world, is accepted at art school and in galleries and museums. The term 'outsider art' is still entirely relevant in indicating the origin of certain works, but I doubt it can still be used to identify relevant differences. These museums bring the outsiders, with or without a label, yet one step closer to the insiders.



Guo Fengyi, The Museum of Everything foto:Thijs Wolzak

The Museum of **Everything** can be visited until May 22 at the Kunsthal in Rotterdam.

The Outsider Art Museum has a permanent collection at the Hermitage in Amsterdam

Cover photo: Christopher Rudquist - The Museum of **Everything** - London